SPEECH FROM THE THRONE 2004

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MAKING SASKATCHEWAN READY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

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MR. SPEAKER, MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE, HONOURED GUESTS, CITIZENS:

Welcome to the opening session of the 25th Legislature of the Province of Saskatchewan.

Following the democratic choices of the people of Saskatchewan, this Legislature begins its work at a unique time in our history.

Today, we stand on the eve of Saskatchewan's second century.

We are now just months away from the celebration of our Centennial. It will be a year in which we celebrate the long remarkable history of Aboriginal peoples in our province. It will be a year in which we will remember the immigrant pioneers who came from every corner of the globe and made this a multicultural and richly diverse place. It will be a year in which we celebrate the accomplishments of our people over the past ten decades, and all that they have contributed to the uniqueness and quality of life that is ours in Saskatchewan.

This Legislature will guide us into that new century. As we look to the future, our government recognizes many challenges that confront us today. Working with our citizens, our government intends to take on these challenges and make this province ready for our future. The changes necessary to take us into the future must begin today. Our task is to make Saskatchewan ready for the next generation.

MAKING SASKATCHEWAN READY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Our next generation will strengthen Saskatchewan and improve the quality of life for us all through their creativity, their strengths, their flexibility and their pragmatism. They are the young people of today — Aboriginal youth and the young from across the province, the country and indeed the world. To prepare the way for them to become the pioneers of the next century and to find their futures in Saskatchewan is the central vision and goal of our government.

As our government said when we sought a mandate last November, we believe that making our province ready for the next century means working today to make Saskatchewan even more youth-friendly; it means building a green and prosperous economy that includes a new role for our Crown utilities and investments; and it means building quality of life in health care for all generations, to support healthy families, neighbourhoods and communities.

It is now the mandate of our government that the doors of opportunity to all our citizens, particularly the young, be opened as we begin our next century.

We will do so in our unique Saskatchewan character.

We have a distinct way of achieving our goals, a special style that combines creativity with flexibility. Engaging in a partnership with Saskatchewan people, our government will deliver this mandate in that same style of imagination and realism, balancing our dreams against day-to-day realities.

EDUCATION AND OPPORTUNITY

To enable young people to gain skills and begin careers, with our educational partners, we will begin to implement the Career Start Program. Career Start will prepare youth for career opportunities here in Saskatchewan and connect youth to jobs.

Our government will further implement our unique School^{Plus} model at the elementary and secondary school levels, and will expand that program this year.

For our very young, we will add more child care spaces.

We will establish Green Teams, bringing together young people, jobs and the building of a greener Saskatchewan.

For students launching their careers, we will expand the youth recruitment plan beyond the Crown Corporations to include the broader public service. We will invite the co-operative movement, Métis and First Nations people, and the private sector to join us.

For our graduates, we will enhance the Post-Secondary Graduate Tax Credit program.

The opening of the Canadian Light Source Synchrotron, the single largest science project in Canada, will attract researchers from around the globe and foster a new era of research and innovation.

We will celebrate and encourage our youth in recreation, sport and culture.

It is the flagship goal of our government that, in this term and in this first decade of our second century, Saskatchewan will become more youth friendly and the first choice in opportunity for all of our youth. Their future and our province's future are one. With the Young Rotarians of Saskatchewan, we say, "Our future is wide open and your future is here!"

BUILDING A GREEN AND PROSPEROUS ECONOMY

But opening the doors of opportunity to the next generation means even more than offering the tools of education and training. All of our citizens, and in particular our youth, require the opportunities that can only be found in a vibrant economic atmosphere and expanding province. Our economy is built on exports. We are Canada's most significant trading economy, and many of those opportunities for our youth will be found in trade.

With vigour, our government intends to build a green and prosperous economy.

Over the course of this term, our government will begin to host annual summits of Saskatchewan people to focus our common efforts in achieving economic, environmental and social progress. The first Saskatchewan Summit will be held this fall.

Immigration will be key in meeting the needs of an expanding economy, and serving to provide growth in our population. Our government will build an aggressive immigration strategy. A new program, Open Up Saskatchewan, will begin to unfold during this session in partnership with the Federal Government, communities, workplaces, and educational institutions. We will immediately increase the number of nominees this year in the Immigrant Nominee Program.

The foundations of a green and prosperous economy are established upon Saskatchewan's abundant natural resource base in our southern agricultural lands, our northern forests, and our mineral wealth across the province.

In partnership with farm families, farm organizations and rural communities, our government will strive to expand opportunities in agri-business and for farm families. We will seek to ensure that young people have as one of their choices the opportunity to work on the land. We will create an integrated, value-added and research-based new agricultural economy.

This is our hope for the future. Today, however, the highest agricultural priority for our government is to work with the livestock industry and other governments to open the borders to the export of Saskatchewan livestock. Anticipating the reopening of borders, we will vigorously pursue our plans to expand the livestock industry. To further assist the industry in the coming year, the Saskatchewan Research Council plans to develop and apply technologies for disease identification and animal traceability.

In forestry, the Centennial year will see the official opening of the new forest centre in Prince Albert, which showcases Saskatchewan wood products and energy efficient technologies. It will provide information for innovation, undertake research, and support Saskatchewan companies to be competitive internationally.

The forests of our north, the mineral wealth of our north, the beauty and hospitality of the diverse communities across our north will play an expanding role in a green and prosperous economy, opening new opportunities for the young people of our north.

We will see growth in our mining sector that will keep us in the forefront of that industry in Canada. Our goal is to see Saskatchewan take its rightful place as the centre of mining activity in the nation. We are dominant in world markets in uranium and potash. We anticipate further development in the uranium industry and further expansion of the potash industry. We have changed the royalty and incentive structure in mining to allow for greater development of traditional minerals, and we will work with industry and communities to expand into new areas of mining such as diamonds.

And our government believes that Saskatchewan has a bright future with energy. Our vast energy potential will be dominant in our province's economic growth.

The energy resources beneath the ground will be aggressively pursued.

During this session, our government will work with industry to expand $C0_2$ injection projects in the oilpatch, both stimulating the industry and reducing greenhouse gases. We will work with industry to enhance recovery of Saskatchewan's immense heavy oil reserves.

Recent discoveries of new natural gas reserves will continue to expand our vital natural gas industry.

We seek to unlock the vast potential of our oil and gas resources for the North American energy market.

As our major coal reserves continue to provide the source for electricity generation, Saskatchewan will play a major role in working towards clean coal technology. The government and its Crown utilities will seek opportunities to research and explore coal gasification as a potential source of new energy.

By the close of this century, however, our energy sources may well be those that come from above the ground. It is the vision of our government that Saskatchewan should lead in these new energy resources, such as wind, ethanol, bio-fuels, solar and hydrogen.

Building on Saskatchewan's Ethanol Strategy, our government welcomes the recent announcements of significant ethanol production in Lloydminster and Weyburn. We look forward to future ethanol and bio-fuel developments. We anticipate the inclusion of cleaner fuel in the Saskatchewan marketplace and the export of grain-based fuels to the North American market.

We will further enhance green power generated by the wind.

And our government will lead in placing Saskatchewan at the centre of the 21st century hydrogen revolution. Our goal, in the next decade, is to make Saskatchewan the national model in researching and demonstrating hydrogen as a new source of energy.

The Saskatchewan Research Council and a partner in the private sector have developed the world's first truck fueled by a combination of diesel and hydrogen.

A green and prosperous economy goes beyond what we have established in our natural resources. New industries in tourism, culture, and information technology will continue to diversify and expand our economy.

Tourism can be expected to increase in our Centennial year as we celebrate our anniversary and as we host major national events such as the 2005 Canada Summer Games. We expect to see a road built from LaLoche, Saskatchewan to Fort McMurray, Alberta, increasing trade and jobs in both provinces. The road will also increase tourism in the north.

Culture will continue to be a significant contributor to the economy. For example, the film industry alone is expected to contribute $45 million to the economy in the coming year. The Saskatchewan-based and produced television comedy *Corner Gas* has seized the attention of Canadians across the country, providing a valuable insight into Saskatchewan wit, satire and culture.

As we build this green and prosperous economy, our government believes that our publicly owned utilities and Crown investments should also play an important role in the quality of life in our province and in our economic development.

Our Crown utilities, built by past and present generations, should serve the next generation of Saskatchewan citizens.

To this end, our government will entrench the principle of public ownership of the Crown utilities in legislation during this session.

To this end, our government will develop the means to achieve our commitment to ensuring basic utility prices that, as a bundle on an annual basis, will provide Saskatchewan families with the lowest cost package from utility providers in Canada.

Our Crown utilities and Crown assets will be used in such a way as to foster economic opportunities for our next century and the next generation. During this session, Investment Saskatchewan will seek private sector management of its assets and will begin to build a pool of private and public sector capital to further expand the Saskatchewan economy.

This year, our government will establish The Young Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan program. Existing assets and private sector capital will be used to help new, start-up business activity and community-based economic development. Under the stewardship of highly qualified business and community leaders, and joined by a pool of experienced business mentors, funds will be available to young entrepreneurs and community-based, small and start-up enterprises.

More than any previous generation, our youth are calling for a green Saskatchewan and a green, sustainable economy for their future.

Our government has heard their voice. We will pursue an agenda of energy conservation. We have taken immediate steps with programs such as the establishment of the Office of Energy Conservation, the Energy Star appliance rebate program, upcoming retrofits of public buildings across Saskatchewan, and Energuide for Houses.

And during this term, our government will unveil a Green Strategy to ensure the sustainability of our resources, the future of Saskatchewan water resources, sustainability of economic and community development, and the preservation and enhancement of our province's natural beauty. Working with Saskatchewan people and communities, we will take this Green Strategy to reality.

A vibrant, green and prosperous economy will open doors to our next generation and allow them to build their futures here. It will be an economy of strength. It will be an economy that will allow all Saskatchewan people to dream big and find the quality of life they want for themselves and their families.

QUALITY OF LIFE

Our government believes that for the sake of our elders and seniors today, for the benefit of families and communities, and for our next generation, our economic progress must result in social progress. Nowhere is this more true than in the provision of health care and in services that support healthy citizens, healthy homes, neighbourhoods and communities.

During this session, our government will introduce a plan to maintain balance in the provincial budget. We will be confronted by difficult budgetary choices. But we must make these choices if we are to provide the health care services Saskatchewan people want and need for themselves and their families.

Guided by the Saskatchewan Action Plan on Health, we will continue to do more for health care. The public expects that our health resources meet the most pressing needs of the people. To achieve this, our government will assess how health dollars are used with a view to ensuring that resources are used most effectively for the benefit of Saskatchewan people.

We will do more to reduce waiting times for surgery and diagnostic imaging, both of which are top priorities of the people of this province. Our government will also ask for people to take a more assertive role in promoting and protecting their own health, that of their families and that of their communities. We will heighten our focus on tobacco control by introducing legislation that will ban smoking in public places across Saskatchewan in 2005. We will also introduce a strategy to assess and support people with cognitive disabilities, which includes Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

Our goal of providing the best public health care in Canada goes beyond health services themselves. Housing is a key determinant of health, and one of the most significant new programs our government will introduce will be a new housing strategy. This five-year housing plan will help thousands of low-income families to establish quality and affordable homes – for many that means living the dream of owning a home. Homes allow families to build their independence and provide stability for their children. Communities across the province will be strengthened as these housing investments are made.

Healthy families require healthy workplaces and fair return for labour.

In this session, Saskatchewan will introduce amendments to *The Labour Standards Act* to allow people to take advantage of compassionate care benefits when caring for gravely ill family members. Our government will continue to implement an Action Plan on Workplace Health and Safety. Our government will conduct regular reviews of the minimum wage.

Building healthy families and communities requires support for our neighbours in need. During this session, two key areas in the Building Independence program – the Saskatchewan Employment Supplement and Family Health Benefits — will be enhanced to ensure these programs continue to support low-income working families.

In this term, our government will release a comprehensive disability strategy that supports people with disabilities so that they can be included in the social and economic life of our communities and province.

This year, the Legislature will be asked to enact significant new legislation to improve the safety and security of our neighbourhoods.

This will build on the spirit and vitality of our communities. This spirit was demonstrated in Regina when it hosted the Grey Cup in 2003; it was demonstrated by the community of Shaunavon when it hosted Hockey Day in Canada last month; it was demonstrated last week when Saskatoon hosted the Nokia Brier, and it will be demonstrated throughout Saskatchewan as we all celebrate our 100th birthday as a province next year.

This year, the Voluntary Sector Initiative will move into its second phase, with the goal of strengthening and supporting Saskatchewan's volunteers, communities and families.

Like bluffs of poplar that rise on Saskatchewan's prairie, for generations we have gathered to live in community. The quality of life in our province has been shaped by community. Looking to the next century, we seek to build stable and growing rural communities and vibrant, diverse urban communities. In our villages, towns, neighbourhoods and cities, we have benefited from the labour and investment of those who preceded us. The next generation should equally benefit from our efforts today.

CONCLUSION

The challenges that confront us in making Saskatchewan ready for the next generation are many.

Building a balanced budget plan will not be easy. Our government, however, is prepared to make difficult but necessary choices to ensure our quality of life, to ensure the quality of our health care and to ensure the next generation is not saddled with this generation's debt.

In shaping our future, our government will seek to engage the people of Saskatchewan and our partners in governance. We will seek new directions and new strategies with municipal leaders. We will seek new directions with our partners in education, and begin the challenging work in providing for the funding of education. We will seek new partnerships and solutions with Aboriginal governments. And we will seek a stronger Saskatchewan and a stronger Canada by tackling fair equalization, health care, and the fiscal imbalance, in co-operation with the Council of the Federation and the national government.

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislature, Honoured Guests, Citizens of Saskatchewan, making life even better for Saskatchewan families in every region of our province, with focus on supporting the future of our young people in their own province, is our government's vision.

As we move forward, we will do so in the unique Saskatchewan style of creativity, flexibility and pragmatism, imbued throughout with the spirit of optimism for the future that is the hallmark of our people.

Many of us have seen the barn north of Aylesbury with the words "Risk n Hope" painted on its roof. That barn and hundreds like it were built by a generation of young pioneers who came to risk and build their future in a province of hope. On the eve of our Centennial, our vision is to make Saskatchewan ready for the next generation who will risk and build their lives in a province of hope.

An agenda of change has been put before you. May you work together so that we may achieve it.

May Divine Providence continue to bless our province and guide this Legislature in all its deliberations. God Save the Queen.